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Letters to Samira (2)

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Yassin al-Haj Saleh



Sammour, do you happen to think -like I do- about the fatal consequences that befell us? You became wanted by the regime a few days after I left Damascus (not any time earlier during two years of hiding). Ahmad was kidnapped just when I left Douma on July 10th, 2013. Firas was

kidnapped on July 20th, 2013, just when I was on my way to Raqqa. The siege on Eastern Ghouta was tightened when I left Raqqa to Turkey on the eve of Eid al-Adha (October 11th, 2013).

Months later, it was possible again to smuggle you to Damascus; money is the key to every locked door in the Assadist state. Time didn't wait for you, Sammour. You disappeared in two months.

Sammour, whenever I think again about what has happened, it seems to me that we made plans and acted as if we were living in normal conditions, while in fact our conditions were unpredictable, exceptional and required extra caution. I feel now that I didn't even think when I told you about leaving at night, only a few hours before I actually left. I feel if I had taken more time to think I wouldn't have left.

I knew about your kidnapping from Ziad Majed; he called me from Paris. I hadn't opened my laptop yet when Ziad called around 10 or 11 am. I didn't have a smartphone. He first told me that Razan was kidnapped. A little later, he called again and told me that you were with Razan. I don't know if Ziad wanted to prepare me for the bad news or he really didn't know that you were kidnapped with Razan, Wael and Nazim.

Based on what I came to know about Jaysh al-Islam during my stay in Douma, and their increasing control and authoritarianism in the city, as well as their previous threats to Razan when you were together and I was in Raqqa (Razan was sure that the Jaysh was behind the threats); based on all of this, I suspected them. Nevertheless, I first

asked for help from those who could help, and afterwards I accused the de facto authority in Douma of the kidnapping. The grave crime became even graver as the perpetrators went to great lengths to deny it. Some people have been assassinated probably because they knew too much about the crime — at least Abu Ammar Khibbiya was assassinated because of that. There was also an assassination attempt of Sheikh Khaled Taffour, at least partly due to him being the judge in charge of the case.

After the chemical massacre, the chemical deal and your disappearance, the regime began regaining the upper hand. It reoccupied al-Nabk, Yabroud and other cities with the help of his Iranian allies, as well as Lebanese, Iraqi, and Afghan mercenaries who were being recruited by Iran (some were prisoners and others poor refugees who had been promised residency in Iran in return for fighting against us). Daesh took full control of Raqqa in the beginning of 2014, a development that suited the regime. It didn't spare an effort to say that it's just fighting extremists and terrorists.

The chemical deal was, in my view, the point of no return in the policy of cruelty and force; the power-worshippers tried to impose themselves on the ground and secure political ties with influential powers; as a result, the political and moral dimension of our struggle was buried deep under a thick layer of international brazenness. Sammour, I sometimes think that since that moment it became impossible to do anything. It's over! You could do nothing to confront an alliance of savage, hate-filled enemies who were just granted an international permission to do whatever they want to their miserable people.

In the summer of 2014, Daesh seized Mosul in Iraq after a surprise attack and took over the weapons the Iraqi soldiers had likely abandoned as they fled the city, as well as money and other equipments. Daesh declared the Caliphate. Our brand-new caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, spoke from al-Mosul mosque in his first and only public appearance. The expensive Swiss watch on his wrist was the only memory left from that scene. The state of Daesh, which called itself the Islamic State, stretched from the east of Homs, Hama and Aleppo through Raqqa and some parts of Deir ez-Zor, to Mosul. Daesh was born during the war, and was at war with everyone. It has killed hundreds of people in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor and thrown many of its victims in a chasm north of Raqqa locally known as **al-Houta** (or the gorge). Among its many front-lines was Kobani (Ayn al-Arab), a town to the northeast of Aleppo which is mainly inhabited by Kurds.

Here, Sammour, the US intervened and dropped weapons and supplies to the besieged Kobani, which was being defended by its inhabitants and Kurdish supporters from Turkey and other countries, all under the umbrella of the Democratic Union Party (which is linked to PKK in Turkey), with support from the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga as well. The siege was broken after four months, and Daesh was defeated, with the town completely destroyed.

Sammour, I deem the US intervention to be the end of the Sunni-Shia conflict phase and the beginning of a new phase, a new layer to the Syrian Revolution which is the imperialist phase, a layer whose legitimizing doctrine is the "war on terror." Of course, the Sunni-Shia conflict went on, and Hezbollah continued to assist the regime in the war and slaughter. The sectarian nature and discourse of Jaysh al-

Islam, Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham also persisted. However, since September 2014, the US started to set the general directions of the events in Syria. By intervening against Daesh, our fight for overthrowing the regime was overthrown itself, relegated to political irrelevance. Since then, the agenda of the powerful has been imposed on our struggle. This was a political massacre committed by those who unashamedly condoned the unforgettable and unforgivable chemical massacre. The regime had already embraced the “war on terror” doctrine and continued to use barrel bombs, chlorine, torture and everything it wanted without fear of reprisal or punishment.

Murdering us was tolerated all the time, and after the chemical deal the tolerance became internationally guaranteed. Today we can conceivably talk about genocide, an internationally sponsored one.

In Eastern Ghouta, bombardment and massacres continued, but there was another conflict going on: a war between Jaysh al-Islam and other formations, which included frequent assassinations. Do you remember Abu Adnan al-Falitani? He was with us in the street during the cleaning campaign a few days before I left. Jaysh al-Islam assassinated him in the end of April 2014, a few months after your kidnapping.

The situation generally headed towards a bloody standstill. Everything happening in the country remained violent, extremely violent, but hardly anything happened in the political or strategic sense. Too much death, too little happening; Sammour, this is a frequent feature of globalizing the struggles in our ill-fated region: the Middle East.

We are in a situation consolidated by the international condonation: those who don't have power, money and connections don't matter. That is to say, most of the revolutionaries and most Syrians have no political weight or rights. Syria became an epicenter of violence fueled by regional and international parties. Some regional and international parties also worked to keep the violence within Syria's borders. The opposition couldn't do anything; many of them are dependent on regional and international powers which weakened their legitimacy and limited their ability to act as a unified front. Many leadership positions in the opposition were occupied by people you have never heard of, Sammour, neither have I or virtually anyone.

Sammour, one year after the US intervention, Russia intervened on the side of the regime in a way reminiscent of the US intervention a year prior. The opposition forces had seized Idlib and progressed towards Sahl el-Ghab and the coastal areas. The doctrine of the Russian intervention is also the "war on terror," but Russia waged a war against all the opposition forces, attacking hospitals, markets and residential neighborhoods, and hardly engaged with Daesh.

Before the end of 2015, Zahran Alloush was killed, probably in a Russian air strike. Do you know that he was killed? He is gone. Abu Humam al-Buwaydani took over his position and continued the civil war in Eastern Ghouta against other formations while trying to impose a one-party system in his emirate.

I forgot to tell you that, in addition to the US, France and the UK are participating in the fight against Daesh, along with many Arab countries; none of them is contributing with great capacities, rather there is an international coalition to

fight Daesh. China is supporting the regime with technology and training. That is, the five countries of the Security Council are our guests in Syria! Does this sound too strange to you? Hard to believe? Impossible? It is. But the impossible is exactly what happened and what is still happening.

You knew, however, how things were going; you wrote in your diaries: "It is a world war, but against the people." Sammour, it is no longer the case that "the world has closed its heart and gone away" as you also wrote in your diaries. The world now protects a murderer on the pretext of fighting a smaller murderer. They even had a theory to justify this: Assad is the lesser evil! To whom? To those who set the agendas and decide what is relevant and what is not.

The whole world is united against the evil Daesh whose jihadi fighters reportedly come from 104 countries. From this, I concluded that Daesh is the world's forbidden desire, the desired enemy by many parties who might be otherwise adversaries. Such a murderous consensus leaves no room for anything other than terrorism.

What I mean, Sammour, is that our world has witnessed a rapid moral, political and legal decay since you disappeared, one which worked for the benefit of the kidnappers. The likes of al-Kaakeh, Alloush, al-Shazli, al-Jolani, al-Baghdadi, and of course al-Assad, are in their best position when the world is that depraved. When everything is bad and destroyed, their villainy and destruction become less conspicuous.

A world with the minimum level of justice, and defense of

justice, could have exerted some pressure on the perpetrators to curb criminality. A world of brazen criminality offers every little aspiring villain with enough pretexts to commit crimes and safely walk the full path of criminality.

Sammour, the world is progressively decaying, becoming **more and more Syrian**. I am not the only one who is saying this nor am I exaggerating. There is a general feeling that the world is descending into worse conditions on all levels. Democracy is in crisis, as is justice and the rule of law. The world's reserve of hope is at historic low.

I will continue in another letter. Please take care of yourself; this is all that matters to me.

Kisses sweetheart,

Yassin